WORKERS' COMPENSATION COURT

2005

EFFICIENT EQUITABLE RELIEF



To provide *reliable* and *reasonable* benefits in a *just* and *efficient* manner, with *compassion* and *respect*, to all employees who suffer a work-related injury.

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The preparation and submission of the Annual Report is, in some ways, akin to a New Year's celebration. While neither I, nor the other members of the staff, approach this task with the same degree of frivolity which New Year's celebrations engender, this report allows us the opportunity for self reflection. We can consider both the successes and failures of the past year and analyze the trends which we expect to see in the coming year. Most importantly, the preparation of this report allows us to focus upon our mission and ask ourselves whether we can do more to serve the people of the State of Rhode Island who seek our assistance.

The first step in our analysis requires, simply, a review of our statistics to see whether we are complying with statutory mandates. I am again boundlessly proud to report that the Court continues to serve the people of Rhode Island effectively and efficiently. The Court continues in full compliance with the statutory requirement that all cases are reached for pretrial conference within twenty-one days of the date of filing. More importantly, the pretrial conference continues to be an effective dispute resolution tool and allows the Court to close more than seventy percent (70%) of the cases assigned to it at that stage. The other facet of that process is that the Court is allowed to focus upon those cases which do warrant a full trial on the merits and to give them the attention they deserve. While these cases do remain open for longer periods of time, the issues involved and the need for a full due process hearing more than warrant the time expenditure. Fortunately, because the judges can address the routine or less complicated cases expeditiously, they have the ability to devote themselves to the more complex litigation.

The ability to manage the caseload at the Workers' Compensation Court allows us to deal with the cases assigned to us in the most efficient manner possible. It has often been noted that the most pernicious enemy to the workers' compensation system is delay. If the Court is unable to efficiently manage its caseload, the backlog will increase exponentially and the time within which cases can be reached for hearing will soon increase. Past experience has also demonstrated that a delay in reaching a case for hearing also results in an increase in the number of case filings. The resulting delays will soon cause a complete breakdown in the system. Inefficiency in the compensation system also exacts a human toll. The disabled employee who can not pay expenses because of a delay in having a case heard or the employer who views the cost of compensation premiums as a crippling expense will soon lose faith in the institution of government which is causing such misery. The Rhode Island compensation system was designed to eliminate this problem and for more than fifteen years has worked equitably and efficiently. It stands as a model dispute resolution system. Each employee of the Court has helped to make that a reality and is justifiably proud of this achievement. More importantly, each employee remains committed to continuing this proud tradition and to further improve the Court's functions. It is preci-



George E. Healy, Jr. *Chief Judge*

to continuing this proud tradition and to further improve the Court's functions. It is precisely this spirit which distinguishes this Court and which assures its continued success.

In addition to the continued efforts to manage the caseload, the Court initiated several outreach programs in the past year which will hopefully assist us in educating the public about the compensation system, in particular, and the judiciary generally. The Workers' Compensation Court, in conjunction with the Workers' Compensation Advisory Council, has commenced an effort to educate non-English speaking workers regarding their rights under the state workers' compensation laws. Judges from the Court presented continuing education programs to attorneys and compensation professionals to educate them regarding the different cultural perspectives which immigrant workers bring to the legal system and how that may affect the way they perceive the workings of the system. This is a continuing effort in the hope that through various educational efforts, language barriers will not prevent the Court from providing the services which these workers and employers deserve.

The Court also initiated an exciting new program aimed at Rhode Island's newest workers, YES-RI (Young Employee Safety – Rhode Island). The Court is in the process of organizing teams of judges, attorneys and compensation professionals to go out to the state's high schools and meet with young workers to discuss safe work practices, the right to a safe work place and the young workers' rights if they are injured on the job. We expect to begin visiting high schools this spring and to reach these students before they enter the workplace. We hope that such education will in fact reduce the number of work-related injuries involving young people and will assist those who do suffer injuries while working.

Throughout this report, we will discuss the Court's challenges and achievements. We do so with a clear realization of our mission to serve the workers and employers of this State and to provide the most efficient, equitable dispute resolution system possible. We understand that the work of this Court may be the sole opportunity to demonstrate to a litigant that the system does work and that the institutions of government can be relied upon. This is a daunting challenge but I sincerely believe that the employees and judges of the Court are anxious to shoulder that burden. I also believe that the dedicated judges and staff will succeed in that noble effort!

Thank you for your interest and support of the Workers' Compensation Court.

JURISDICTION AND PROCESS

The Workers' Compensation Court is charged with jurisdiction over all disputes between an employer and an employee related to workers' compensation. The litigation brought before the Court varies from a simple petition seeking a determination that the employee was injured in the course of employment to the resolution of complex medical issues relating to the nature and extent of the employee's disability. All cases are heard before a single judge sitting without a jury. The trials before the Court follow the Rhode Island Rules of Evidence and the Workers' Compensation Court Rules of Practice. At the close of evidence, the trial judge renders a decision and decree addressing the merits of the controversy.

As the compensation act has been revised and the benefits expanded, the Court's role in the process has also been extended. The Court hears all disputes relating to the payment of benefits for loss of use and disfigurement. It also has original jurisdiction over petitions brought by the employee seeking a right of reinstatement and petitions which attempt to craft a rehabilitation plan for an injured worker. Finally, all compensation settlements must be heard by the Court to ensure that the proposed settlement is in the best interest of all parties to the system.

If any party to a workers' compensation claim is dissatisfied with the Court's decision, the first step in the appellate process is within the Compensation Court. After the appeal is perfected, the matter is assigned to an appellate panel which must review the record, the reasons of appeal, the parties' memoranda, and, thereafter, submit a written decision. Any party who is dissatisfied with the decision of the Appellate Division may petition the Rhode Island Supreme Court for a writ of certiorari to pursue the appeal in that forum.



Judge George T. Salem, Jr., Judge Debra L. Olsson, and Judge Janette A. Bertness

THREE STAGES OF LITIGATION

PRETRIAL

The Workers' Compensation Act requires that all pretrials must be heard within twenty-one (21) days of the date the petition is filed. The Court continues to adhere to this important mandate.

TRIAL

If either party is dissatisfied with the pretrial order, the matter may be appealed for full trial on the merits, following which the Court issues a formal decision and decree.

APPELLATE

Any person who is dissatisfied with the decision and decree of the trial judge has the right to claim an appeal to the Appellate Division.

When the appeal is perfected, the Chief Judge assigns the matter to a panel of three judges who are required to review the file and the reasons of appeal and to hear oral argument to determine whether the appeal has merit.



MILESTONES

APPOINTMENTS

On June 24, 2005 ROBERT E. HARDMAN was appointed Associate Judge of the Workers' Compensation Court. Judge Hardman graduated from the Community College of Rhode Island in 1978 and the University of Rhode Island in 1982. Prior to his graduation from Suffolk Law School in 1988, Judge Hardman worked as an assistant court clerk in the Rhode Island Superior Court. He was counsel to the Secretary of State from 2001-2003. During his years of private practice he focused on workers' compensation, personal injury, real estate, products liability and medical malpractice litigation. He was admitted to practice before the United States Circuit Court of Appeals for the First Circuit in 1994. With the appointment of Judge Hardman, the Workers' Compensation Court has a full complement of judges for the first time in over three years.



JOHNA. SABATINI was appointed Administrator of the Workers' Compensation Court on May 13, 2005. Previously, he had served as the Deputy Administrator since January 2002. Prior to his service with the Court, Mr. Sabatini was a practicing attorney. He also served in the Rhode Island Senate where he was chairman

of the Senate Labor Committee and the Workers' Compensation

Advisory Council. He was instrumental in the formulation and implementation of the 1990 and 1992 Workers' Compensation Reform Legislation.

On June 27, 2005 GEORGE D. MASON was appointed Deputy Administrator of the Workers' Compensation Court. Prior to his appointment, he was Director of Policy and Legislation for the Attorney General's Office. In addition to his statutory duties, he will assist the Court in various outreach, policy and legislative initiatives.

RETIREMENTS

BARBARA VALLESE, a clerk of the Workers' Compensation Court retired in December 2005, after more than 13 years service to the Court.

In July of 2005, DR. M. HOWARD TRIEDMAN resigned from the Workers' Compensation Court's Medical Advisory Board. Dr. Triedman, a graduate of Columbia University Medical School, was a former Chief of Neurology at Miriam Hospital. He was also in private practice in Providence for a span of over 20 years. Dr. Triedman was appointed to the Board in 1992 as one of its founding members. He played an integral role in the original drafting of the Protocols and Standards of Treatment for Compensable Injuries.

RETREAT

During October of 2005, the Court held a one day off-site strategic planning retreat at the Museum of Work and Culture in Woonsocket. At the meeting, our judges and senior administrative staff discussed ways to improve operational efficiencies and deliver enhanced service to our constituents. Particular attention was focused upon the Court's Quality Improvement Plan. This Plan will increase Court efficiency and customer service, as well as reduce system errors from initial filing, through and including the conclusion of the appellate process. Full implementation of the Quality Improvement plan is scheduled for mid-March 2006.

CONFERENCE

The Workers' Compensation Court co-sponsored the 8th Annual New England Workers' Compensation Educational Conference in Newport, Rhode Island from October 30 – November 1, 2005. The conference brought together recognized workers' compensation professionals from throughout the East to instruct and discuss a multitude of workers' compensation legal issues, medical issues and recent developments. One of the highlights of this year's conference was the presentation of Workers' Compensation Law Updates by Chief Justice Joseph R. Weisberger (ret.), Rhode Island Supreme Court.

CONVERSION

In March 2005, the Workers' Compensation Court became the first Court in the Rhode Island Judiciary to complete the conversion from the outdated WANG system to the ACS Justice Information System (JIS). The staff did a remarkable job entering and converting over 100,000 records dating back to 2002 in a manner that was seamless for the litigants and practitioners.

APPELLATE HIGHLIGHTS

The Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Act is a specialized law designed to address the unique needs of employers and employees in litigation involving work-related injuries. It contains a number of unique procedures to assist the parties in the prompt resolution of the litigation flowing from an injury. Thus, the Act and the Court's Rules of Procedure have provisions for alternate dispute resolution, expedited pretrial conferences and processes to fast track certain types of litigation. In each case, the goal is to provide the most expeditious litigation process available.

One facet of the compensation law which recognizes the specialized nature of the Court's litigation process is the Appellate Division. The Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Court is the only Court in the unified judiciary to have an intermediate appellate process created pursuant to statute to hear appeals from a decision of the trial court. Under the provisions of R.I.G.L. 28-35-28, any party has the ability to pursue an appeal as a matter of right to the Appellate Division of the Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Court. Under the provisions of the statute, the appellate panel consists of three judges appointed by the Chief Judge of the Court to hear and decide appeals brought before it. One of the judges assigned to the appellate panel is designated as the lead judge. The appellant can claim an appeal within five days of the date on which the decree was entered. Thereafter, the appellant must file reasons of appeal and memorandum according to the timeline established by the Court. The appellee is then afforded the opportunity to file a reply brief to address the alleged errors raised by the party on appeal. Upon the completion of the written materials, the matter is usually assigned for oral argument before the Appellate Division. The appellate panel is charged with the responsibility to review the trial decision in light of the legal and factual arguments made in order to determine whether the decision should be allowed to stand or should be reversed.

It must be noted that the statute requires the Appellate Division to accord great deference to the decision of the trial judge. The statute specifically notes that: "the findings of the trial judge on factual matters shall be final unless an appellate panel finds them to be clearly erroneous." In practice, this provision essentially provides that if the trial transcript reveals the presence of any evidence to support the findings of the trial judge, the decision must be allowed to stand. Clearly, the legislature has unequivocally expressed its satisfaction with the fact finding process undertaken by the Court and has sharply limited attacks on a trial decision based upon the judge's factual determination. It is also another aspect of the process in which the compensation law has created a process to streamline the litigation process and to ensure that the Court deals with litigation at the appropriate time and level. To that end, the Court has

established several appellate screening procedures to assist in the prompt closure of cases at the appellate level. In the past year, the Court formalized the process to require that all parties engage in a meaningful settlement conference before the case is assigned for oral argument. The parties to the appeal are required to meet with a judge of the Court to conduct settlement negotiations. If the matter can not be resolved at the settlement conference, the Court can nevertheless use this conference to screen the cases for appeal. If a matter assigned to the Appellate Division involves a contested issue of fact and there is evidence to support the decision of the trial court, the judge conducting the settlement conference may assign the matter to an expedited hearing. Similarly, if the case involves a legal issue controlled by settled law, the hearing on the matter may be expedited. The screening allows the Court to prioritize the cases which are appealed to the Appellate Division and deal with the less complicated cases in a summary fashion. Likewise, cases of first impression or those cases involving complex legal or medical issues can be given the priority they deserve.

In 2005, the Appellate Division continued a trend which it had developed over the last four years and again closed more files than were opened. In the last calendar year, there were fifty-eight (58) appeals taken to the Appellate Division. In the same period, the judges of the Appellate Division disposed of sixty-four (64) appeals. These results continued a trend which began three years ago and has resulted in remarkable success in eliminating the backlog of cases pending before the Appellate Division. In 2002, the Appellate Division finished the calendar year with one hundred and seventy-two (172) active cases. On December 31, 2005 only ninety-two (92) cases were pending. Judge Debra Olsson's supervision and effective case management has contributed to this remarkable progress. She and the other judges who have performed such tireless service at the appellate level have made this success possible.

One final aspect of this success story can be found by evaluating the number of claims of appeal which were pursued to the Appellate Division. In 2002 one hundred and forty-four (144) cases were appealed. In the past year, there were only fifty-eight (58) claims of appeal. incredible decline in this statistic graphically demonstrates the respect accorded the decisions of the trial court. While any case which is decided in an adversarial proceeding must generate a "winner" and a "loser", the fact that the number of appeals has declined so precipitously demonstrates that the litigants are recognizing that the judges have responded appropriately to the merits of the controversy, according to the law and their conscience. This is, indeed, a tribute to the diligence and integrity of the Court and its continuing commitment to providing the most effective and equitable dispute resolution possible.

THE JUDGES



UDGES

(clockwise from upper left)

The Honorable Hugo L. Ricci, Jr.

The Honorable Dianne M. Connor

The Honorable Edward P. Sowa, Jr.

The Honorable George T. Salem, Jr.

The Honorable Robert E. Hardman

The Honorable Janette A. Bertness

The Honorable Debra L. Olsson

The Honorable George E. Healy, Jr.

Chief Judge

The Honorable John Rotondi, Jr.

The Honorable Bruce Q. Morin





YES-RI

On October 31, 2005, Chief Judge George E. Healy, Jr. unveiled the blueprint for the Court's "YES-RI" (Young Employee Safety-Rhode Island) program at the 8th Annual New England Workers' Compensation Educational Conference in Newport, Rhode Island. YES-RI is a coalition of government and private organizations aimed at improving the safety and health of teen workers through education and advocacy.



Nationally, each year, some 70 young people are killed on the job while approximately 100,000 young people seek treatment in emergency rooms for work-related injuries. Since, it is estimated, only one third of young employees' work-related injuries are treated in ERs, it is likely that approximately 300,000 youths sustain work-related injury or illness each year.

According to the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, almost 800 Rhode Island youngsters under the age of 18, report being injured on the job each year. However, while this accounts for only 2.5% of reported injuries among all workers, research shows that these numbers are misleading. Injuries among this population often go unreported. Workers under 18, because of their youth, are unfamiliar with the system. Often when they are injured, they receive medical treatment via their parents' health plan or through RIte Care.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health reports that nationwide young people are injured in the workplace at twice the rate of adult workers. Yet, no single agency has the ultimate responsibility for protecting young people from workplace hazards. Many of these injuries could be avoided if there were proactive education and prevention programs in our state's high schools as well as in the workplace. The YES-RI program is designed to help reach these young adults.

A steering committee was formed to develop a curriculum for use in schools. The program will pair judges with lawyers and safety engineers in teams that will visit schools and teach young workers about injury prevention, young workers' rights and the workers' compensation system.

It is anticipated that the YES-RI educational outreach program will be rolled out during March and April of 2006.

THE YES-RI COALITION'S GOALS ARE:

- *Coordinate teen workplace safety and injury prevention efforts statewide;*
- Educate teens, their parents, employers, school personnel, policy makers and the public on workplace safety, injury prevention and young workers' rights;
- * Advocate for teen workplace safety and injury prevention;
- Provide data on work experiences and work-related injuries of teens for use in future program development and evaluation.

IMMIGRANT WORKERS' PROGRAM

Immigrant workers labor in some of the most hazardous employment in this country. The number of injuries and deaths to this portion of the population is extremely high and increasing. Nationally, there are 16.5 million foreign born workers. In Rhode Island, over 200,000 people speak a language other than English at home. These workers comprise fifteen percent of Rhode Island's workforce.

Many immigrant workers who are willing to perform dangerous jobs, are unfamiliar with US safety requirements. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), in 2002, twenty-five percent of fatal workplace injuries in the U.S. involved either workers who did not speak English or had a supervisor unable to communicate with their employees.

Because these non-English speaking employees do not have access to reliable information in their own language, they are often victimized by unscrupulous employers who do not comply with the state's insurance, safety regulation, and workers' compensation laws. Since this segment of our workforce is unaware of their legal rights, they often fail to take appropriate action to obtain the benefits due them following a work-related injury.

The Court began its outreach to the non-English speaking worker community in 2003 when several judges and court personnel appeared on Radio Poder, a radio station broadcasting statewide to this community. Their goal was to reach out to the Hispanic community and inform them of the workers' compensation system and their rights under the law.

The radio show culminated in the Court's first Citizens' Summit held at Feinstein High School on September 18th 2003. There, members of the immigrant community met with the judiciary to share their concerns and to obtain information about the judicial process in Rhode Island. This extremely well received forum became the foundation on which the Court built and expanded its outreach to the minority workers' community. From this forum, the "Immigrant Workers Program" was launched.

The Workers' Compensation Court sought to further understand the non-English speaking litigant and their culture in order to better serve this under represented community. To that effect, Chief Healy, in concert with the Worker's Compensation Advisory Council, established the "Minority Task Force" subcommittee whose mission was to: "Evaluate current outreach efforts to Rhode Island's non-English speaking community and to propose new initiatives to educate all parties to the system (employers, employees, attorneys, insurers, physicians, and members of the judiciary) regarding the best methods to protect this population when they suffer a work related injury".

THESE EFFORTS PRODUCED THE FOLLOWING NEW PROGRAMS:

- The Rhode Island Trial Lawyers Association (RITLA), with the assistance of Steven Minicucci, Esq., designed and presented an educational program for attorneys representing injured, non-English speaking workers. RITLA sponsored the seminar to instruct its members on the ethical, procedural and cultural concerns involved in representing non-English speaking, or undocumented workers, before the Worker's Compensation Court and other courts within our Judiciary.
- A similar seminar for insurance claims administrators and medical service providers was presented for The Beacon Mutual Insurance Company in November, 2005.
- At the 8th Annual New England Workers' Compensation Educational Conference held in Newport from October 31 through November 2nd 2005, the program was presented again for workers' compensation professionals in the New England area.

It was at the New England Workers' Compensation Educational Conference that the Immigrant Worker's Program received a \$10,000 grant from the International Workers' Compensation Foundation (IWCF).

The Immigrant Worker's Program is a joint venture of the Center for Hispanic Studies and Advocacy (CHISPA), the Immigrant Workers' Rights Project of the Institute for Labor Studies and Research, the United Workers' Committee of Progresso Latino, and Immigrants in Action. Its goal is to provide a comprehensive community outreach program to newly arrived immigrant workers who are limited in English or are non-English speaking. The program's goals are to provide workplace accident reporting and prevention information as well as education about Rhode Island's workers' compensation system at community events and through print media, radio and television. User-friendly pamphlets, printed in Spanish, Portuguese, Cambodian and Hmong, will be developed.

The campaign will be staffed by Community Outreach and Education Coordinators who are bilingual, bicultural and experienced in immigrant outreach programs. The coordinators will provide information and coordinate outreach and educational activities for the non-English speaking community. The outreach will bring the workers' compensation system in general, and the Court in particular, into the immigrant community where it can better learn the cultural values, norms, traditions, and beliefs of the community, while educating non-English speaking workers about their rights under the Workers' Compensation Act.

STATISTICS

Court Productivity

Case Type	2005	2004	2003	2002
PETITIONS FILED	8,234	8,564	8,684	8,982
PETITIONS DISPOSED	8,492	8,429	8,775	9,258

PETITIONS FILED BY CASE TYPE

Case Type	2005	2004	2003	2002
Original Petition	2,783	2,899	3,027	3,076
Employee's Petition to Review	1,951	2,165	2,171	2,178
Employer's Petition to Review	1,629	1,646	1,568	1,767
LUMP SUM SETTLEMENTS	763	669	780	856
PETITION TO ENFORCE	799	983	873	929
Petition for 2^{ND} Injury Fund	I	0	0	0
PETITION FOR MEDICAL PAYMENT	131	66	161	70
MISCELLANEOUS PETITION	177	136	104	106
Total	8,234	8,564	8,684	8,982

DISPOSITION RATES

Case Type	2005	2004	2003	2002
Pretrial	71%	73%	70%	67.6%
Trial	28%	25%	29%	31.1%
Appellate	1%	2%	1%	1.3%

PRETRIAL TIME FRAMES

Case Type	2005	2004	2003	2002
o-60 Days	78%	80%	81%	82.4%
61-90 Days	9%	8%	13%	7.2%
91+ Days	13%	12%	6%	10.4%

APPELLATE CASE MANAGEMENT

Case Type	2005	2004	2003	2002
Appeals Taken	58	67	102	144
Appeals Disposed	64	95	145	121

STATISTICAL HIGHLIGHTS

If the success of the Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Court were measured strictly by its statistics there would be no dispute regarding our achievements. In 2005 the Court disposed of more files than it received and continued to do so promptly. As noted, the Court received 8,234 petitions for filing and closed 8,492. This statistic is particularly gratifying when compared to last year's data. In 2004, the Court actually opened more files than it closed. Two factors contributed to this positive development. The number of cases filed with the Court actually declined by four percent (4%) in the last year. In addition, the Court once again returned to a full complement of judges after several years in which it was routinely short one judge. The retirement of several older members of the Court and the time frames involved in the selection and confirmation of a replacement, essentially created a situation where the Court was understaffed. The addition of Judge Robert E. Hardman in July 2005 has returned the judicial roster to completion. Since the Court can reasonably expect to be fully staffed for the entire calendar year, we fully anticipate that the number of closings will continue to rise this year.

The decrease in the number of filings is certainly an interesting development and, when it is considered with another reported statistic, it may actually signal an extremely promising trend. In 2005, the

number of Petitions to Enforce declined by nineteen percent (19%) from 983 to 799. These petitions are usually filed with the Court only when the employer has failed to comply with the terms of an existing agreement or decree regarding compensation. Thus, they truly are a measure of the employer's efficiency. While the number of Petitions to Enforce filed in 2004 had increased dramatically (thirteen percent (13%) more than the prior year) the present year's filings are the lowest in the last five years. It would tend to suggest that the employers and insurers have improved their claims handling procedures and are avoiding needless litigation. Such a practice not only contributes to the efficiency of the Court but also reduces the expenses of the entire system since the parties need not incur expenses for costs, counsel or witness fees. Thus, this decrease in filings bodes well for the future of the entire system.

For the second consecutive year, the time frames for the closure of cases at pretrial conference have increased. In 2004, eighty percent (80%) of the cases were decided at pretrial conference within sixty (60) days while only eight percent (8%) of the cases were still at the pretrial stage for more than ninety (90) days. In the past year, only seventy-eight percent (78%) of the cases were heard within ninety days and thirteen percent (13%) of the files were pending more than ninety days. This trend has caused some concern and the Court has committed itself to reversing this

practice in the next year. While the cause for these elongated time frames is, more than likely, a desire on the part of the judges to utilize alternate dispute resolution processes to resolve the cases, the files do reach a point where additional time will not assist in closure. It must be remembered that the most useful tool in dispute resolution is the realization that the case has reached a point where it must be settled or decided. The prompt pretrial conference allowed the Court to use that tool most effectively and resulted in the settlement of cases. If there is a perception that the decision will be delayed to attempt to achieve a more amicable resolution, mediation will never be a priority. Thus, tightening the time frames for the preparation of a binding Pretrial Order is essential to foster a desire and a will to resolve the cases promptly.

The foregoing review graphically demonstrates the commitment which the judges and staff of the Workers' Compensation Court have to providing the most efficient dispute resolution system possible. As noted earlier, we are very proud of our achievements but, more importantly, recognize the areas which call for redoubled efforts to improve the process. In part, this system remains vital because the judges and staff continue to seek ways to improve the procedures of the Court and to explore better ways to serve our clients. We pledge ourselves to continue to do so in the future.

We hope that the 2005 Annual Report demonstrates the commitment of the judges and staff of the Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Court to faithfully serve the citizens of our state. Annually, financial and legal changes require the system to adapt in order to complete its mission. This report illustrates how well we have responded to the challenges presented. While we are proud of what we have accomplished, we also realize that much needs to be done to achieve our goals. We will continue to work diligently to improve.

If any member of the Court can be of assistance, please feel free to call.

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